

Possible Compromise Signaled by Kremlin

Paris-Bonn Proposal May Provide Basis

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, April 28—The Soviet Union today gave the clearest sign yet that it was ready to find a political compromise and begin negotiations on independence with Lithuania, perhaps based on a proposal earlier this week by France and West Germany.

President Mikhail Gorbachev's official spokesman, Arkady Maslennikov, told reporters that the Kremlin leader "does not insist" that the Lithuanians cancel their March 11 declaration of independence but that Vilnius, for its part, "should not insist on its implementation."

French President Francois Mitterrand and West German Chancel-

lor Helmut Kohl proposed, in a joint letter to Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis, that the republic's leadership "suspend for a time the effects of the decision taken by your parliament" in order to begin negotiations with Moscow. Maslennikov called the statement "an appeal to reason against extremism" and said it was close to Moscow's position.

Maslennikov said the Lithuanians could "save face" by keeping their declaration "for history" but, at the same time, return to the framework of Soviet law by declaring a freeze or moratorium on the implementation of their independence decree.

"They may change it, whatever they do with that declaration, it be-

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longs to them, but we cannot start with that declaration as a legal basis. It is illegal," he said.

Asked if the Kremlin would be satisfied with a temporary suspension of the declaration as a way to begin talks, Maslennikov said, "Yes, you may say so, without specifying what temporary is. Because some would say two weeks. . . . How long would they need to sort out all these questions?"

In Vilnius, Lithuanian President Landsbergis said he was drafting a response to Mitterrand and Kohl with ideas on how to fulfill their plan. But he made it clear that one compromise he would not make is a temporary suspension of the independence declaration.

"We cannot go back to accepting the Soviet constitution. We cannot take that step backward because it would mean the voluntary rejoining of the Soviet Union," he said. "Such a step would be even worse than the occupation of 1940. We cannot revoke our constitution and have another one functioning in our country. We cannot even do this for a temporary period."

Lithuanian deputies formally resigned from the Supreme Soviet in Moscow today, and deputies from the Baltic republic of Estonia suspended their membership in the national legislature until the start of

formal talks with the Kremlin on independence for their republic, the Associated Press reported.

The effects of the economic embargo continued to grow worse in Lithuania, and Moscow increased the pressure today, suspending shipments of coal to the republic. Soviet officials said the republic had not paid for the coal that it has stockpiled.

Officials told the state news agency Tass that the republic was receiving about 30 percent of its previous supply of natural gas "which should fully meet communal needs if not used for industry." There are already shortages of gasoline, paper, raw materials for the food industry, metal and timber.

Tass said 35,000 people in the republic could be out of work by next month if "events continue to develop in this way." About 10,000 workers already have been forced out of work.

Lithuanian Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskiene said the republic, in an attempt to beat the embargo, was expecting two shiploads of oil from abroad May 12 and 14 at the port city of Klaipeda. She would not say what country had agreed to provide the oil. Last week Prunskiene visited Scandinavian countries in an attempt to purchase oil. She is preparing to travel to Canada and the United States to meet with businessmen and Lithuanian emigres.